

Transportation measure off the ballot

The Arizona Secretary of State on Monday tossed out a \$42.6 billion dollar transportation ballot initiative because of a lack of valid signatures.

In order for an item to make the ballot, it must have 153,365 signatures. According to the Secretary of State's Office, the transportation initiative was 15,000 valid signatures short.

However, the backers of the initiative were not short because they didn't turn in enough signatures; they were short because of the high number of submitted signatures that were ruled invalid.

In total there were 260,608 signatures turned in to support the ballot measure, and 122,247 were ruled invalid. Signatures can be ruled invalid for a variety of reasons from filing problems to people who signed the petition not being registered voters.

In Arizona the Secretary of State's Office and all counties play a part in the verification of signatures.

In this verification process the secretary of state looks at the signatures first, then reduces the pool by tossing out invalid signatures. Remaining signatures are sent to their county of origin for further verification.

Representatives from the TIME coalition are working hard to challenge the legitimacy of those rejected signatures and believe they can find 15,000 legitimate signatures among the 122,247 that were ruled invalid.

If the coalition does believe they can find enough legitimate signatures, they must then file a lawsuit against the secretary of state's office, contesting the invalidation of signatures.

The coalition must work quickly because the deadline to print publicity materials promoting the measure is around the end of the month.

The ballot measure, which is referred to as the TIME initiative, proposes a one percent increase on sales tax during the next 30 years to fund \$42.6 billion worth of transportation projects.

Projects the initiative possibly could have funded that would have benefited citizens of Maricopa include: widening the 347 from four to six lanes, widening the I-10 to six lanes between Riggs Road and the I-8 and the construction of a grade separation at the 347 and Union Pacific crossing.

Supporters of the measure believe the tax increase is necessary to maintain healthy growth in Arizona.

"If this initiative doesn't pass in two years, there will be no more money available for new roads; ADOT will go into maintenance mode," said Katie Hutchinson, deputy campaign director for the TIME initiative.

Critics of the measure say that taxpayers will never pass a tax rate increase in a time of economic downturn, and that there are other ways to fund road construction.

"This is an unwise, unnecessary tax," said Darcy Olsen, president of the Goldwater Institute, a non-profit public policy, research and litigation company.

One of the other ways of funding roads, Olsen pointed out, is through private construction. When private

companies come in, they build the roads and then just charge people who use them a toll.

“The way it works is that the company is allowed to charge a toll on the road for a set amount of time, and then ownership of the road reverts to the state,” Olsen said.

Backers of the TIME initiative are confident they will be able to successfully revoke the Secretary of State’s ruling on the invalid signatures and get the bond measure on the ballot.

File photo

